

Safety

COMPLIANCE ALERT™

Training
Shop



This training tool is included with your membership to Safety Compliance Alert – the latest news, rules, updates and training tools for a safe company and a safer workforce.

The dangers of fatigued workers

■ Keys to keeping workers alert on the job

Feeling fatigued on the job might not seem like that big of a deal. But working when you're drowsy can lead to safety incidents and injuries.

The risks of fatigue

For fatigued workers, the risks are a lot more significant than feeling a little tired on the job.

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) only getting five hours of sleep each night can triple a worker's risk for depression, slips, trips and falls, muscle strains, and dehydration.

And if you're in the transportation industry, fatigued driving can lead to devastating accidents.

Watch for these signs in yourself and your co-workers that signal fatigue on the job:

- **Physical:** Look out for yawning, eye rubbing, slurring of speech, slower reaction times or staring blankly into space for a few moments.
- **Mental:** Telltale signs include having a hard time concentrating, grasping new facts, fading motor skills or even hallucinating.

- **Emotional:** Being unusually quiet or withdrawn, not feeling motivated, or showing inappropriate emotions for a given situation are telltale signs of fatigue.
- **Thinking:** Symptoms include exhibiting poor judgement, flawed logic or not recognizing effective solutions to problems.
- **Communicating:** You or your co-workers may be fatigued if you begin misinterpreting instructions.

Prevention steps

Here's how you can prevent fatigue:

- **Work reasonable shift lengths.** Five 8-hour shifts or four 10-hour shifts per week work well. Shorter shifts during evening hours tend to be more effective than longer ones.
- **Get at least 10 consecutive hours of time off-duty daily** to ensure you get enough sleep.
- **Small rest breaks every couple hours** will help you regenerate.
- **Look at workloads in relation to shift length.** Longer shifts tend to be better for light work.



FIGHTING FATIGUE

You can take steps to prevent fatigue on the job.

Here's what you can do:

- **Make time for sleeping.** Give yourself enough time to get a good night's rest (about seven to eight hours) after your shift ends.
- **Choose a sound sleep location.** Make sure your sleep area is someplace that's dark, comfortable, quiet and cool. This will help you fall asleep fast and stay asleep longer.
- **Create a sleep ritual.** Read or listen to relaxing music before you go to bed, and only use your bedroom for sleeping.
- **Pay attention to light.** Avoid bright lights, including computer and mobile device screens, before bedtime. Get more exposure to sunlight, particularly when you get up in the morning.
- **Eat right.** Be sure to avoid heavy meals, alcohol, caffeine and other stimulants several hours before turning in for the night.
- **Stay fit.** By exercising regularly, you can manage stress levels, stay healthy and improve your quality of sleep. Just don't exercise right before you head to bed.

Training Shop Quiz

NAME _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

1 It's better to save heavy work for longer shifts because it'll help keep you alert for a longer period of time.

true false

2 Pushing through your shift without many breaks will keep your momentum up so you'll stay engaged and won't get as tired as you would otherwise.

true false

3 You might be fatigued if you're feeling unusually withdrawn or unmotivated on the job.

true false

4 Eating a heavy meal or drinking alcohol right before bed will lead to a more effective night's sleep.

true false

5 Getting less than eight hours of sleep can lead to fatigue and increase your risk for workplace hazards including slips, trips and muscle strains.

true false

6 Exercising right before bed is a good way to tire yourself out so you fall asleep right away and sleep soundly.

true false

7 You should have at least 10 consecutive hours of time off-duty between work shifts.

true false

8 Finding a comfortable area to sleep isn't all that important as long as you have enough time to get 7-8 hours of shut-eye.

true false

9 Fatigue affects all of your faculties, including emotional, mental, physical, communication and thinking skills.

true false

10 It's better to keep shifts shorter, especially during night hours, or to limit your number of long shifts.

true false

ANSWERS

1. **False.** Try to schedule lighter work for longer shifts to prevent yourself from getting overly fatigued.
2. **False.** It's better to take small breaks every couple of hours at work to help revive yourself and combat any tiredness.
3. **True.** Emotional fatigue symptoms include feeling withdrawn, unmotivated or showing inappropriate emotions for a given situation. If you're experiencing these symptoms, it's time to get some sleep.
4. **False.** Heavy food and lots of alcohol before bed can lead to interrupted sleep. You should also avoid consuming caffeine.
5. **True.** Sleep deprivation can lead to dangerous workplace injuries.
6. **False.** While regular exercise can help improve sleep, avoid it right before bed – it'll act as a stimulant.
7. **True.** This will help you get 7-8 hours of sleep.
8. **False.** You'll get better sleep in an area that's dark, quiet, cool and comfortable.
9. **True.** When you're fatigued, your entire body is affected. And this will challenge your job performance abilities.
10. **True.** Working five 8-hour shifts per week or four 10-hour shifts will give you the time you need to get enough sleep each night.

BY THE NUMBERS



Here are some fatigued worker stats:

- NIOSH reported that in the 2000s, 30% of workers said they got six or fewer hours of sleep daily.
- A National Sleep Foundation study found that close to 25% of transportation workers said fatigue affects their job at least once a week.
- 10% of workers reported falling asleep at inappropriate times.
- 17% of workers said fatigue affects their job performance at least once a week.